

**PRESS CONFERENCE:**

**Rear Admiral Patrick Driscoll, Multi-National Force – Iraq Spokesperson  
Dr. Ali al-Dabbagh, Government of Iraq Spokesperson**

**DATE: April 13, 2008**

**TRANSCRIBED BY:**

**SOS INTERNATIONAL LTD.**

**PARTICIPANTS:**

**Rear Admiral Patrick Driscoll  
Dr. Ali al-Dabbagh**

**REPORTERS:**

**Jill Daugherty from CNN**

**Unidentified reporters from Al-Watan TV and Al-Watan TV Newspaper**

**REPORTERS 1-14**

**\*REP1 = REPORTER 1**

**\*INT = INTERPRETER**

**RDML  
DRISCOLL:**

As-Salāmu `Alaykum. Good afternoon. I'm Rear Admiral Patrick Driscoll, here for MNF-I. I'd like to thank you all for coming. Let me welcome my good friend, Dr. al-Dabbagh, Government Spokesman for Iraq. He's going to join me here today and we'll make a few statements and then ask...take your questions.

I'd first like to give you a brief update on recent security operations. The Government of Iraq has removed...has moved forward in Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul to protect innocent Iraqis, to drive out foreign-led terrorists, and to enforce the rule of law. In Basra this week, Iraqi Security Forces continued operations against illegally armed gangs, intimidation and extortion groups, and other criminals. Although there still is much work to be done, citizens in Basra are beginning to report a return to normal life. Early this week, I spoke with Major General Abdul-Karim Khalaf, the director of operations for military—from Ministry of Interior who was in Basra helping oversee security operations. He indicated that the situation in the city has improved, and that the stability is being restored. In part, he reported, this progress is due to the growing number of tips from local citizens which are allowing security forces to conduct targeted raids on suspected criminal hideouts. The number of armed criminals on the streets of Basra has decreased significantly since operations began there in late March. To date,

Iraqi Security Forces have arrested over 430 criminals, including 28 death row convicts who had been at-large in Basra before the operation began. Coalition forces continue to provide operational advisors, surveillance information, and air-strike support for operations in Basra. But the progress thus far in Basra is largely due to the resolve and bravery of the Iraqi ground forces, the efficiency of the Iraqi Air Force in maintaining supply and support, and the operational direction of Iraqi civilian and military leadership. In Baghdad, Iraqi and Coalition Forces continue to...continue security operations against individuals who illegally carry weapons and launch attacks against law-abiding citizens and security forces. Under the direction of the prime minister, Iraqi Security Forces have redoubled their efforts in recent days in certain parts of Baghdad, including Sadr City. Coalition forces continue to support the Iraqi Security Forces in these operations focused on securing districts that have suffered from abuse and neglect of terminal gangs and outlaws. Without improved security, it is difficult to provide essential services so that people can live their lives peacefully and freely. The Iraqi government, with the support of coalition, will continue to focus efforts to establish local security and are committed to following security with the delivery of essential services such as health, electricity, water, sewage, and trash disposal. The people of Iraq deserve an opportunity to live

without fear and intimidation brought upon them by criminals and thugs. They also deserve reliable public services, employment opportunities, and hope for a better life. The coalition is committed to supporting the Government of Iraq to achieve these goals. With that, I'd like to ask Dr. Ali for his comments and then we'll take some questions.

**DR ALI:** Shukran, General Driscoll. [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** Thank you, Admiral Driscoll. Good afternoon, everyone. Prime Minister Maliki is now visiting or making a visit to the European Union in Brussels. It will start on 14 April and he will meet with the chief of the European Union and the representative, Mr. Korzay, and also with Mr. Javier Sulana, who is the supreme coordinator. And also he will meet Mr. Diyab, who is the general secretary for the NATO and he's heading a security delegation and a political one. The aim of the visit is to enhance the political economic situation and relations, and also to conduct talks about gas and energy, because Iraq has a huge amount of gas and the European need it. And also, they will talk about the cooperation and the commerce agreement between Iraq and the European Union which...There are also a lot of projects with the European countries

and this visit will contribute in pushing forward the relationship between both Iraq and the European Union. There was a statement by Prime Minister Maliki affirming our efforts to maintain our riches and resources and to liberate them from all corruption and everything that hurts the economic situation in Iraq and ensures providing the essential services. Prime Minister Maliki has ordered the following: [1] It is prevented that any of the people could enter to the gas stations and the refineries and the warehouses that belong to the Ministry of Oil or that contracted with it. And anyone who disobeys this or anyone who steals money in any way will be questioned. [2] The places that distribute oil should be or should commit to the prices that are legislated by the country or the government. And also, they should commit also with the prices set by the Ministry of Oil including the price and size of the gas and oil distributed to the citizens. [3] All the ministries and...should adopt the certain procedures to take their share from the gas and monitor the distribution system. [4] The minister of oil should take the good procedures to ensure the presence of the contractors that sell the gas to the citizens. [5] The minister of oil should coordinate with the special services from the Ministry of Interior to pursue all those who break the law in Article 1 and 2, and present them to court because those things are described or could be described as those that sabotage the Iraqi economy. The Council of Ministers decided

in its session today to approve the Elections Bill in the provinces, and all the details have been discussed. And this law or this bill has been approved and it will be passed to the Council of Representatives so that they pass it. And as you know, when the Bill of Provinces is approved by the Council of Representatives, I think it will have or set the mechanism for all the elections and all the laws that are connected to it. And based on that, the elections will be at the beginning of October this year. During the next coming weeks, we will announce the names of the oil companies that have been rehabilitated that will also invest in the oil fields. And the Ministry of Oil will announce this, because the ministry have followed or adopted certain standards and rehabilitated over 135 companies. And the rehabilitation is still ongoing to rehabilitate further companies that still did not provide any documents that qualify it to be one of the companies that is registered at the Ministry of Oil. And this will make the oil production...will develop the oil production in Iraq.

We have also adopted the development plans for the year, which is a plan that is adopted by the governments. We don't plan for one year as it has been done for the past five years. We need...we will do other kind of plans and that the ministries could provide their plans to the Ministry of Planning. We also passed or approved the

price for the...for some food like the rice and the corn with 900,000 dinar for the...for one ton, that is. And also, we approved that the corn will be priced at 600,000 for one ton and 400,000 for the wheat so that we can help the farmers in producing and also in selling those goods in the market. Now we will take the questions.

**REP1:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** Question from Al Watan TV to Admiral Driscoll and then Dr. Ali Dabbagh. Do you think that if you have participated with the Iraqi forces in much more way, in a much bigger role, do you think the outcomes would be much better? Dr. Ali Dabbagh, the budget for 2008 is a commercial one. Do you think that the events in Basra will influence the reconstruction of this budget?

**RDML  
DRISCOLL:** First, in pertain...pertaining to the question about the Iraqi Security Forces and working in Coalition Forces, the event in Basra was an Iraqi planned, led, and executed operation, and it was very successful. And something that is important to remember is it is still ongoing. And so, the Iraqi forces are doing exactly what we all hoped. They are taking charge. They are taking the lead in

operations. And they are performing well. A lot of lessons learned, no doubt, will come from the process, but it's a good step in that they are taking the lead in a major operation.

**DR ALI:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** Regarding the events in Basra...of course, any kind of act that threatens security influences the budget and the way it is being implemented. And the government decided to expedite the projects in Basra and it allocated \$100 million for the projects in Basra. And there were also projects in Baghdad and Mosul so that we can expedite the development and reconstruction in Basra and also to create job opportunities in Basra. There is a budget also, an integral budget also in 2000...with an additional \$5 billion to be disbursed on the strategic projects that are actually a supplemental thing for the infrastructure and also could create job opportunities.

**REP2:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** Question to Admiral Driscoll. Then after that, another question to Dr. Ali Dabbagh. First, we have seen the Multi-National Forces and



they are taking a position or a stance that the Iraqis don't aspire to in the three places in Baghdad and [inaudible] and in Sadr City. And until now, the Iraqis view the Multi-National Forces as they are attacking those places. We want from you or the Multi-National Forces clarify to the Iraqi people that they are not attacking those places. The second thing, to...I would like from Dr. Ali al-Dabbagh not to explain the plan and we know about this.

**DR ALI:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** Ask your questions, please.

**REP2:** [Continues speaking in Arabic.]

**INT:** I'm talking about the reflection, of the security reflection about the new formation of the Iraqi government.

**RDML  
DRISCOLL:** I'll take the first part of the question. The Iraqi Security Forces and the Coalition Forces, as you know, are working in unison in Baghdad as part of the surge, and that process is continuing. And

so, in neighborhoods where individuals are not part of the security forces, not part of the Iraqi police or Army, and are carrying weapons, they are doing so illegally. And so, the efforts of the Coalition in supporting the Iraqi Security Forces is to enforce the rule of law. And so in any parts of Baghdad, in places you mentioned and others, that's going to be the role of the security forces.

**DR ALI:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** There are some political efforts done by the Prime Minister Maliki and the president, and you know...and this has been reflected in a positive way about the relationship between the politicians and the National Security Council or the decision made by the National Security Council also paved the way to a dialog between the political sections. There is an optimism among all parts that such a dialog would lead to a better formation for the government, and this is what we all hope. So, I think that everything is being positive now, an environment is positive and we need—there is a call also to the political blocs and those withdrawn also. And as I said, the dialog is still ongoing.

**REP3:**

Thank you. Jill Daugherty, CNN. Admiral Driscoll, could you clarify the use of the word “criminals”? We...in the public announcements of...that are coming out from the Multi-National Forces, they say specifically “criminals” in most cases, although there are groups that we know, such as Mahdi Army and others. Why no specific reference to those groups? And also, are the men who are fighting there—men and women—are they told specifically who they are fighting, or is it just generally described in the field as criminals? And Dr. Dabbagh, if I could just ask a quick question about the oil contracts. There were existing oil contracts under Saddam Hussein. And could you refresh my memory, are any of those old contracts going to be honored?

**RDML  
DRISCOLL:**

The use of “criminals” is used for those who violate the law. And under the Iraqi constitution, under the power invested in the executive branch, the security forces of Iraq are the ones that are authorized to openly carry weapons and use those weapons. So, those that are doing that are the ones that are designated as “criminals” and are being prosecuted.

**REP3:**

And the men in the field?

**RDML  
DRISCOLL:**

Men in the field are basically told the rules of engagement, and those are the rules of engagement. If you are out there carrying a heavy weapon, if you're out there with a mortar tube, if you're out there with...planting EFPs, you are certainly violating the law and you will be engaged.

**DR ALI:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:**

Concerning the oil contracts that had been signed with the former regime, all those contracts that are actually legal will be protected, or will be respected, of course, like the contracts with the Chinese. But those that had been signed in an illegal way that contain some violations to the Iraqi law, it won't be accepted. Still, several companies that used to work with the oil ministry have been rehabilitated, and they...everyone is being given an equal footing and opportunity to sign contracts, oil contracts.

**REP4:**

[Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:**

Dr. Ali, I have two questions. What's your comment about the decision made by the Council of Ministers about the oil contracts? I suggest that this decision could be generalized to the private gas stations that exceed the price that is set by the government and the

price is actually set by the government, which is much more than the price that the government has said. So, I'm suggesting that to give some instructions to those private gas stations. Admiral Driscoll, good afternoon. Most of the Iraqi people...and as this gentleman said that most of the American forces are aggressive against the people. I think that this has been going on for two years and the Multi-National Forces had a better way to....

[A brief dialog in Arabic ensues with no translation provided.]

**INT:**

I would like—just—okay. For example, the prisoners; we have seen that so many officials go to the American prisons with American commanders, and they say that those prisoners are innocent and then try to get them out from the prison with approval from the American forces. And thousands of them are being released. So this leads to a distortion to the image of the Multi-National Forces. Why do you held people who are innocent? Why don't the...why doesn't the Multi-National Force release those people instead of just waiting an Iraqi official to come and say that they are innocent so that this process could improve the picture of the American Army before the Iraqi people?

**RDML  
DRISCOLL:**

Okay. First, we've had many briefs in this conference room about

the detention of security threats in Iraq. And we've also had discussions about how that changes, is different from how prisoners are held in the violation of criminal code in Iraq. Those that are detained under UN Security Council Resolution 1790 are held in U.S. detention in order to prevent them from violating Iraqi security. So it's not a criminal code, it's a security process. Dr. al-Dabbagh and I have visited Camp Bucca together. The main focus in Camp Bucca, which is our main detention center, is to educate and rehabilitate people in order to release them as quickly as possible. The United States, down at Bucca last year, released over 8,000 prisoners. And we've released over 4,000 so far this year. The process of those that we've released under this educational program, less than one percent has been rearrested. So, the mission is not to keep people in detention; the mission is to make people good citizens and try to educate them, provide them with some services, provide them with job training and some money to get back and be a productive member of society.

[A brief dialog in Arabic ensues with no translation provided.]

**REP5:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** Question to Admiral Driscoll regarding the recent events showed

that there is an illegal weapon in Iraq and this also destabilize the situation. Isn't it possible to control the places that those kind of weapon infiltrate or the flow of such weapons, because the number of such weapons from the neighboring countries has become something continuous? And question to Ali Dabbagh, is it possible to give us the total of the illegal weapon that is still now in Iraq?

**RDML  
DRISCOLL:**

In terms of controlling the border, controlling the border is a very difficult thing. And when you put large measures, almost draconian measures, in place to prevent a small or a...some number of weapons from coming across the border, you start curtailing free trade and economic development. And that's one of the goals is to encourage free trade. So, you know, if we are talking about weapons being supported, coming in from elements of Iran into Iraq, that...it is a problem. There is also money coming across. But even more difficult to control is people. People coming from Iraq, going to Iran, and being trained in terrorist techniques, and coming back across the border and setting up networks to attack Iraqi Security Forces, to attack Coalition Forces, and kill innocent civilians. So, really the solution isn't probably more border control, it's probably a political solution with the Iranians honoring the pledge they made to the Iraqi government not to interfere in the internal affairs.

**DR ALI:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** We don't have an exact number of the illegal weapons in Iraq. This kind of weapon is being infiltrated and it's not easy to give you the number. And most of those weapons and illegal weapons come from outside Iraq.

**REP6:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** Question to Dr. Ali Dabbagh. A few moments ago, you talked about the bill of the Provisional Council had been approved. And I think that this bill has been presented to you with the general Amnesty Law and the budget. This is the election. Why haven't you approved this bill before? Are there some amendments to it? Admiral Driscoll, question to you. Did the Multi—did the American forces or the Multi-National Forces contributed in the Basra operation, or it was just the logistics support that they actually...?

**DR ALI:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** The bill that has been given or approved...or now has to do with the elections in the provinces and its connection with the central



government. This one talks about the elections in the provinces and how to carry out the elections and the conditions to carry out those elections in the provinces.

**RDML  
DRISCOLL:**

The support provided by Coalition Forces includes some planning and some advisors at the headquarters, some special forces support to Iraqi special forces, and also some air support in the form of helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft to provide air support. I also want to add there is also aid coming in from international organizations supporting the effort down in Basra. So, it's an important thing to remember that a lot of logistical support and relief is coming in from them.

**REP7:**

[Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:**

Question to Dr. Ali Dabbagh. A few days ago...or the Fayhaa TV showed confessions of two terrorists that had been captured in Diyala by the security forces—the Iraqi Security Forces. And they are from al-Qaeda. And those two terrorists confessed that...and confessed doing...conducting operations or terrorist operations and they confessed that those who financed them is [inaudible], the head of the Moslem [inaudible]. And as you know, [inaudible] supported al-Qaeda on TV. And he said that he belongs to...or he probably

said that indirectly. Will you adopt any certain procedure against al-Dodi[ph]? Thank you.

**DR ALI:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** There are some certain procedures that we follow and the government follows in the judicial system. When there is a confession by a certain person, the law or the thing that is being...the government does not interfere because the judicial system is an independent one and it adopt a certain...its own procedures in dealing with such things, and...

**REP8:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** Question from Al-Watan Newspaper. Doctor, you've said that you've adopted certain procedures for the development, and do they include any strategic plans for the national...in the country...national sec- ...strategic plans?

**DR ALI:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** Those development plans have been done in the past for one year. And we have approved that the Ministry of Planning with coordination with other ministries to present a strategic plan for

three years or five years, not only one. And it shouldn't be for one year only, as in the past. So the plans for the projects should be for three or four years for bigger projects and plans.

**REP9:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** Question to Dr. Ali Dabbagh. This political situation that is going on through our visit in Sadr City and to...we've seen that the government used arm against the Sadr Trend or JAM and do you think that JAM will also use force against the government? Is there a nonmilitary action? Are there any dialogs with...between the government and the Sadr Trend? Or some say that there are some hidden dialogs.

**DR ALI:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** The government doesn't see that it's fighting or facing any political blocks. Others who say those things are held accountable for that. Anyone who is carrying weapon in an illegal way will be faced by the government. If you belong to any kind of political block, this will not give you an immunity, because no one has the right to possess an illegal weapon. And our brothers in the Sadr Trend are an essential part in the government and the political process, and

they have a presence in the Parliament and in other institutes. The government does not face those trend and other trends, and there are some certain people who try to make use of some religious and political figures, but the government will not allow or tolerate such violations.

**REP10:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** Question to Dr. Ali Dabbagh. Do you expect that there will be a return for the IAF to the government? And what about the Iraqi List? The List or the Iraqi List stipulated that the government could provide apology to...present apology to Dr. Ayad Alawi.

**DR ALI:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** There are some...there are dialog and there are dialogs between Prime Minister Maliki and Hashimi and the Front. The Iraqi Accord Front said that they will present names for ministers to Prime Minister Maliki so that they could fill the vacant ministerial seats and that will be done according to the standards that we adopt and conditions. The government is not in a place to...or in a position to apologize to any political side. We did not accuse Dr. Alawi and all those accusations do not prevent the official stance of the

government. Dr. Alawi and his list has a good presence in the Iraqi government and its institutions as well.

**REP11:** The Government of Iraq—some officials have warned that there is not that clear distinction between criminal groups and Jaish al-Mahdi. How much of a part has Jaish al-Mahdi played in this recent fighting? And second question, there's no JSSs that have been so successful in other areas in Sadr City and Shula. Is there any plan to push those out into problem areas like Sadr City and Shula to help out?

**RDML  
DRISCOLL:** Well, the...Muqtada al-Sadr has said that he has the freeze in place, and the freeze continues. And so, by definition, anyone in Jaish al-Mahdi should be honoring that and not carrying weapons. So the splinter groups that have gone away from listening to Muqtada al-Sadr and are carrying weapons and invoking violence are the ones that are being...causing the violence and being targeted by Iraqi Security Forces and Coalition Forces in Baghdad and elsewhere.

**REP11:** The second question?

**RDML  
DRISCOLL:** I'm sorry?

**REP11:** The second question about the JSSs.

**RDML  
DRISCOLL:** In terms of...I don't know the...I'll get back to you on that. I don't know the exact plan for joint security stations as they add new ones and new ones come on line in Baghdad there. I'll have to get back to you.

**REP12:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** Question to Admiral Driscoll. There has been a security improvement after ten days of violence in Iraq. Are you ready if there have been any kind of violence in the central Iraq to do the same thing? And if things got worse, what is the percentage of improvement now because there are some places now still witness a destabil- ... or are considered still hot zones. And Dr. Ali Dabbagh, there is an initiative by the Sadr Trend and presented by the Sadr Trend, and what have you done about this initiative and what have you done about the attacks with the Sadr Trend? Will you allow the Sadr Trend to participate in the coming elections if their arms have been removed? Not those who are actually splintered from the Sadr Trend.

**RDML  
DRISCOLL:** I'll go first. Okay. The violence has come down significantly since

the surge hit its peak in July of last year. And throughout the last seven or eight months, we've seen a significant decrease in violence. There has been somewhat of a spike lately, but we're seeing that come down as well again. General Petraeus has said that there are going to be tough days ahead when we got to the point where violence had come down in Baghdad, and he knew that there was going to be additional fighting, there are going to be additional problems, there are going to be additional challenges. And so, it's going to be a tough fight. There are going to be spikes in violence. But the issue is, who is going to be the ones that enforce the law? Who are the ones that are going to be in charge of Iraq? And those that are authorized, those that are elected officials, that represent the Iraqi people, and are elected and charged with protecting them are the ones that should have the weapons. And those that...militias, gangs that carry weapons are threatening the Iraqi people and preventing them from getting security and the economic prosperity that they need to have. And those are the ones that are...the security forces are going to focus on.

**DR ALI:** (Speaking in Arabic)

**INT:** Regarding the disarmament, this was a decision made by all the political blocs, and anyone who has a militia or any kind of weapon

will not take part in the political process. And we have certain mechanisms and conditions. It should be a peaceful one, and not an armed one. It doesn't only include the Sadr Trend or JAM, but it includes also all the political blocs that want to take part in the elections. And it should have no militias or any kind of armed groups or weapons. Not all those who carry weapon are JAM. Of course, there are some other groups, and the government has its own mechanism in defining all those who interest in takes part in the elections.

**REP13:** (Asks question in Arabic)

**INT:** Last question. Why does the Iraqi official loses his temperature in the press conferences contrary to the American one?

**DR ALI:** (Speaking in Arabic)

**INT:** Well, I'll answer that after the press conference.

**REP14:** (Asks question in Arabic)

**INT:** Dr. Ali Dabbagh, could you tell us some details about the nego-  
...the talks with the American side about the long-term agreement?



**DR ALI:** (Speaking in Arabic)

**INT:** The talks and the negotiations are still ongoing, and it's still at the beginning, about the friendship and coordination between Iraq and the United States...and talks about several aspects and topics...and people who are discussing all those things are still doing their work and nothing has been achieved so far, and once there is anything, we will give you some details about this.

**RDML  
DRISCOLL:** Thank you very much.